

PROPOSAL TO JOIN THE BATH & WELLS MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST

Frequently Asked Questions Rev 1: 21 March 2017

This note updates the FAQ which was issued in February and seeks to address the concerns which have been raised by parents. Changes and additions are underlined.

1. What is an academy?

An academy is a state-funded school which is not under the direct control of the local authority. Academies have more independence over what they teach, how they operate and how they spend their budget. All academies are charities and are therefore non-profit making.

2. What is a multi academy trust?

A multi-academy trust (MAT) is a group of two or more academies working together in a legally agreed formal collaboration called an academy trust. The MAT sets the general ethos for all the schools in the MAT. It is the legal employer for all the staff and determines common practices and procedures across the trust, while encouraging each academy to have its own individual identity.

3. Will all schools have to become academies?

The Government has made it clear that it hopes all schools will become academies. During 2016 it consulted on a proposal to make conversion a legal requirement, but that proposal attracted a great deal of criticism and was dropped. However it is clear that life will be very difficult for small schools which do not convert, particularly in local authorities where most schools have opted to become academies.

a. Parent Question: **The Government no longer requires that all schools become part of MATs. So, why are we doing this now?**

Most if not all primary schools in Bath are actively considering becoming academies and the local authority is already withdrawing some of its support services or increasing the cost of them. If we do not join a MAT we would be at risk of having to pay more for essential services such as payroll, which would reduce the amount we can spend on delivering the right outcomes for the children.

4. What are the benefits of joining a multi-academy trust?

By joining a MAT which shares our values we will protect our ethos and individuality. We will be able to work with other schools in the MAT to offer new opportunities for our children, spread good practice, improve standards and provide enhanced training and career

development for our staff. The MAT will be able to make efficiency savings, for example through bulk purchasing, which will help to offset the effect of cuts in school budgets.

5. Why do Governors want to join the Bath & Wells MAT?

- As a Church of England School we have always worked very closely with the Diocesan Board of Education and we know that they share our values.
- We know that the ethos of the Bath & Wells MAT is very similar to St Andrew's ethos. Both share the commitment to helping our children to experience 'life in all its fullness' through a creative and innovative curriculum and a strong commitment to enabling every child to have an outstanding education of mind, body and spirit.
- The Bath & Wells MAT is well established, with 18 primary schools already in the MAT. With the support of the Diocese it has built a strong central team and developed a track record of success in delivering school improvement and in providing training and career development for its staff.
- Feedback from schools already in the MAT is very positive.
- The St Andrew's staff team have been kept informed and do not have any major concerns about joining this MAT.
- The Diocese has worked closely with its local schools for over 100 years. We believe that this historic relationship will continue into the foreseeable future, and that the Diocesan MAT therefore offers a secure and sustainable future for St Andrew's.

6. Are there any drawbacks to joining the Bath & Wells MAT?

At present the schools in the MAT are mostly located some distance from Bath, clustered around Taunton and around Weston-super-Mare. Unless some other Bath schools join, we may have to travel some distance to attend training or networking events. However St Stephen's School has now announced its intention to join the Bath & Wells MAT and we are aware that a number of schools in and around Bath are seriously considering the option of joining. We expect that the MAT will be able to create a Bath-based hub of around 6 schools, which will enable us to continue to work with neighbouring schools. However we also see benefit in being able to work with schools that are further afield, within and outside the Bath & Wells MAT.

- a. **I am concerned that St Andrew's will disappear in this enormous and growing MAT. How will a Bath Hub work in reality?**

We have the opportunity, with St Stephen's and potentially other local schools, to shape the Bath hub of the MAT to meet our needs and wishes. All schools want to protect their individual character and ethos and we are confident that the MAT will respect our values and help us to promote them.

- b. **The Bath & Wells MAT is not a local MAT.**

The creation of a Bath hub will give the MAT a strong local presence.

7. Why do you need to decide now? Would it not be better to wait and see whether a Bath hub is going to be viable?

Most of the schools which might form part of a Bath hub are actively considering their options. For many of them, the decision will be influenced by what other Bath primaries decide to do. Since we have reached a clear decision we think it is right to make it public now to help our neighbouring schools to decide.

8. Why have you ruled out joining the Sulis Minerva Trust?

The Sulis Minerva Trust is an attractive concept with a vision and values which are similar to ours. However as a brand new organization it has no track record and it has not yet been approved by the Diocese and the Regional Schools Commissioner. It would therefore be a much higher risk than the established Bath & Wells MAT. It is also likely to be slightly more expensive, and to require more senior leadership time to complete the set-up process.

9. Have you considered any other MATs?

We have considered Palladian, which is a MAT set up by Ralph Allen Academy. Around 8 primary schools located on the south side of Bath have decided to join Palladian. There are obvious potential benefits in joining Palladian for primary schools which send all or most of their pupils on to Ralph Allen. However St Andrew's children go on to a wide range of secondaries and there would be no particular logic in us joining Palladian. We have also considered the Comenius Trust, which is a MAT set up by Weston All Saints Primary School. This MAT currently consists only of WASPS and the new school being built at Ensleigh. It would not offer the benefits of working with a wider group of schools.

10. What will change when we join a MAT?

Let's focus first on what will **not** change – St Andrew's ethos, values and commitment to giving every child the best possible start to their education. We will continue to develop our innovative creative curriculum, working with a wide range of local partners and sharing our experience widely. In time, we hope that through the MAT we will be able to offer even more exciting opportunities for our children.

The main changes will relate to where we get our support services (school improvement advice, HR and legal advice, payroll services etc) where we will look to the MAT central team rather than the local authority.

- a. How much control will the MAT exert? I am very happy with St Andrew's and worried the Head and staff team will have to change the ethos.

The Governors looked very carefully at this before deciding that the Bath & Wells MAT is the one which is most likely to respect our ethos and values. We believe that there will be no need for any change to our ethos.

- b. What is the MAT policy on diversity? Will there be training?

The MAT is committed to promoting an educational community based on love and inclusivity, providing a beacon of hope where all can flourish. The Church of England recognizes that St Andrew's approach to inclusivity is one of our strengths: our inclusion policy is published in the Appendix of the Archbishop of Canterbury's commissioned report: *Valuing All God's Children: Guidance for CofE Schools on Challenging Homophobic Bullying* published in May 2014. This is one of a number of areas where we can share our good practice with other schools in the MAT.

- c. How will the school curriculum change, if at all, particularly in relation to religious education? Will there be more religious lessons?

The curriculum will not change. There are detailed legal requirements on the teaching of RE which all maintained schools are required to follow, whether they are church schools or community schools.

- d. Will the uniform or the logo change?

We have not discussed this with the MAT, but we do not expect the uniform to change. Nor do we expect to change the logo (the St Andrew's tree).

- e. Will the admissions policy change if we join this MAT?

Admissions policy will remain the responsibility of the local Governing Body. The policy is reviewed each year. Joining the MAT will not require us to change the policy, but it would be open to the Governing Body to consult on changes if it considered this to be in the best interests of the school.

- f. It's hard to know what this looks like until it happens. I can't see how it will have an adverse effect on the already great school and may even benefit us all.

The Governing Body agrees that there will not be an adverse effect. We believe that there is much to be gained by joining the MAT.

11. Will we still take part in sport and other events with schools in Bath that are not in our MAT?

Yes. We will continue to play a full part in local sporting and cultural events and performances.

- a. Will the children be expected to travel to join the other schools within the MAT for events?

This may happen from time to time, where the school considers that this would be in the children's best interests. We already take children to events organized by the Diocese, for example the summer leavers' service in Wells Cathedral.

12. How will the teachers and TAs be affected?

There will be a formal consultation with staff and their trade union representatives before the decision to join the MAT is confirmed. Staff will transfer to the MAT on their existing terms and conditions. The Bath & Wells MAT has a comprehensive programme of training and development for all of its staff, and there will be exciting career development opportunities within the MAT.

- a. What are the resources for training and support like in the MAT and how does that compare to the LA? How do the staff feel about the changes?

The MAT has a well developed training programme for staff at all levels, and we believe that this will prove to be more sustainable than the training which the local authority will be able to offer in future. Staff will have the opportunity to raise any concerns when the statutory consultation takes place.

13. How will governors be affected?

The St Andrew's Governing Body will become a sub-committee of the MAT Board of Directors. It will retain its current constitution and will carry out broadly the same functions as now, although some decisions will be taken by the CEO of the MAT after consultation with the Governing Body. There will be a detailed Scheme of Delegation which spells out where accountability lies.

- a. A reflection of the school population and beliefs needs to be shown in the Board of Governors, instead of the board being made up of majority Diocese members.

The composition of the Governing Body is laid down by law (the School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2012). As a Voluntary Aided Church School we are required to have a majority of Foundation Governors, and this requirement will continue to apply when we become an academy.

14. Will there still be elected parent governors on the Governing Body?

Yes.

15. What happens now?

The Governors will enter into discussion with the Bath & Wells MAT to draw up a detailed timetable for carrying out the financial, legal and other administrative work which needs to be done. That will allow us to set a target date for joining the MAT.

16. Where can I find out more?

You can find out more about the Bath & Wells MAT on their website

<http://bathwellsmat.org/> The Diocesan Board of Education website includes a lot of information about the process of becoming an academy

<http://www.bathandwells.org.uk/supporting-children/school-organisation/academies/>

17. Framing this announcement as 'parent consultation' when it has already been decided is a huge confidence loss for parents. Many are very upset.

The Governing Body recognizes that the announcement came as a shock to some people and with hindsight we could and should have done more to keep parents in the picture during the autumn.

As we said in our letter, the decision to begin the formal application process is not a firm commitment to join. The Governing Body expects that we will become a member of the Bath & Wells MAT, but if the detailed work to be done over the next few months throws up new information which suggests that this would not be the right long term solution for St Andrew's we could and would reverse our position.